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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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TAGS: [SCUL](#) [UNESCO](#)
SUBJECT: UNESCO: FIRST INTANGIBLE HERITAGE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
PRODUCES INTERNAL EU FRICTIONS AND ELECTS FIRST MEMBERS TO
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMITTEE

11. Summary. The United States participated as an Observer State at the first General Assembly (GA) of States Parties to the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Convention from June 27-29. The GA's most important accomplishment was the election, on the final day, of the meeting of 18 Convention States Parties to the Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) (see list of States elected at paragraph 4 below). The actual voting process, however, was preceded by a protracted, highly contentious debate over geographic representation on the Committee. States Parties were divided over two irreconcilable principles for determining Committee membership: proportionate regional representation (i.e., regions with the largest number of States Parties to the Convention would hold the most Committee seats) versus equal regional representation on the Committee. Final resolution of this issue has been put off until the next GA meeting, set for late October in Algiers, when six additional committee members will be elected, raising the Committee's size from 18 to a maximum of 24.

12. Summary continued. The alignment of regional groups within that debate pitted Western and Eastern European States sharply and openly against each other. No substantive matters were discussed, and none will be taken up until the Committee's full complement has been reached. The ICH Committee began on a highly politicized note that is likely to continue shaping its outlook and work for the foreseeable future. On balance, the U.S. gained useful, firsthand insights by participating as an observer at this meeting and, for a variety of reasons, should continue to track this process. End Summary.

13. Fierce competition between regional groups for elected positions on the Committee provoked deep divisions that infected the meeting's atmospherics right up to adjournment. Representatives of EU States -- both States Parties and non-States Parties (such as France and Italy) -- worked in unusually close collaboration with the U.S. throughout the meeting. This contrasted sharply with the United States' experience at UNESCO last fall during the cultural diversity

convention negotiations. Eastern Europe States Parties, which outnumber those from Western Europe, found common cause with Asia-Pacific States Parties (led by India and China) seeking to impose a system of "proportional representation" on the Committee. The Latin American States aligned themselves with Western European States to advocate a system of "equal regional representation" on the Committee. The Africa Group and Middle Eastern States, though less strident than Eastern Europe, nonetheless sided with Asia-Pacific States.

¶4. The centerpiece of this meeting was the final day's critical election of 18 States Parties to the Convention to fill seats on the IGC. The breakdown of States elected by Regional Groupings was as follows: Group I (Belgium and Turkey); Group II (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Romania); Group III (Brazil, Mexico, Peru); Group IV (China, India, Japan, Vietnam); Group V(a) (Gabon, Nigeria, Senegal); Group V(b) (Algeria, UAE). Interestingly, Iran had put forward its candidacy within Group IV, but did not get elected.

¶5. There were a few other noteworthy developments that occurred during the three-day meeting. By design or chance, during the morning of the first day of meeting, the French Senate approved both the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention and the Diversity of Cultural Expressions Convention, moving both instruments one step closer to formal ratification. This development was dramatically announced to those assembled. Japan, China, and Algeria, in that order, offered to host the next GA of States Parties, but Algeria was ultimately selected because the chair of the meeting was Algerian former Foreign Minister Mohammed Benjaoui.

¶6. The Inter-Governmental Committee once it begins to function will, among other things, be responsible for drawing up criteria (subject to the approval of the GA of States Parties) for determining which "intangible cultural heritages," (as defined by the Convention) will be included on two lists to be established and maintained. One list will comprise a "Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity." The other will comprise a "List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding."

¶7. Begin Comment. In practice, the Committee's implementation of this Convention is likely to encounter many of the substantive challenges that have been faced by the World Heritage Committee under the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. For this reason, it is possible the two processes could begin to feed off of one another for better or worse. The upcoming meeting in Algiers will likely be an important barometer for the Committee. For a variety of reasons, the Intangible Heritage Committee's evolution merits continued close monitoring by the U.S. for the foreseeable future. End Comment.
Oliver